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U.S. Navy photo MC2 Nathan K. Serpico

Students Discuss Academic Environment During TLC Open Forum

By MC2 Nathan K. Serpico

Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) students, faculty and staff gathered for a student-led forum to explore how teachers teach, and how students learn, July 31. The effort is part of a series of open campus discussions to engage the NPS community, helping to inform leaders as they plan on the establishment of the Teaching and Learning Commons, an effort identified in the university's new NPS strategic plan.

"The Teaching and Learning Commons puts together existing resources in order to make them more effective in supporting faculty and students in their endeavor of teaching and learning at NPS," said Dr. Ralucca Gera, Associate Provost of Graduate Education.

"We're pursuing certain avenues in revitalizing the way we teach, learn and even advise here at NPS," she added. "I wanted to hear from students on campus on how they best learn."

A student representative from each school, including doctoral and international students, presented to a group of peers and professors about what they felt were the strengths and weaknesses in their field.

"Not much is worse than sitting through a class listening to material that is not current or accurate, that students know will have no practical application in their careers," said Graduate School of Business and Public Policy student Air Force Capt. Tyler Flansburg.

"Most students enjoy engaging in discussions, and faculty should foster a classroom that is receptive of that instead of conducting one-way lectures," he continued.

Many of the presenters echoed similar themes of increased engagement in the classroom.

“My thought is that if the material isn’t interesting to me, then I’m figuring it’s probably not interesting to the students either, so I try to present the information in a way that I find compelling,” said Cmdr. Kathleen Giles, a former PhD student who became a permanent military professor following graduation. “It’s good to get input from both sides and for both sides to hear those inputs. There are some people that have been teaching for a long time, and it’s possible that they need to brush up on their techniques.”

The Teaching and Learning Commons is just one of multiple action areas identified in the university’s 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, providing a road map for NPS to maximize the impact of its world-class education and research programs to the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and their partners. The strategic plan, in its entirety, can be found on the university’s website at <https://my.nps.edu/strategic-plan/>.

“My hope for the Teaching and Learning Commons is to have both a physical and virtual presence,” said Gera. “Through these forums, I’m looking for suggestions for what else we could help with. And for a virtual presence, the website, my hope that it will become a one-stop shop for all to go to.”

Gera stressed that NPS students, staff and faculty are still welcome to provide feedback and suggestions for improvements to teaching and learning at NPS by e-mailing TLC@nps.edu, or visiting the TLC website at <https://www.nps.edu/tlc>. The next Teaching and Learning Commons open forum discussion will be held on Tuesday, Aug. 21, it titled “How We Teach, Learn and Advise” with focus being on the school’s faculty.

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